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Resist use of tobacco funds to solve crisis



Tight budget revenues mean Kentucky legislators are looking in every nook and cranny for extra funds so that education and human services programs don't suffer. That could involve thoughts of raiding tobacco settlement funds. Lawmakers should flee such temptation.

The \$180 million received since the settlement was finalized in 2001 has been a big boost to Kentucky's rural economy.

The funding has helped provide momentum toward an overall diversification of an agricultural economy that has been rooted in tobacco production. Such is the idea behind proposed legislation that would use \$10 million of settlement funds to develop an industrial park for the Purchase Area Regional Park Authority.

Providing an opportunity for communities that have been especially dependent on tobacco to recruit new industry to provide jobs will in the long run strengthen the area – and the state's – economy.

Funds are also indirectly impacting the economy through such projects as smoking-cessation, anti-drug and anti-alcohol programs. The financial impact such efforts will have are bound to be significant.

Helping Kentuckians stop smoking and other destructive habits should produce savings to the state's health care system that will more than pay

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for the investment required. Because it's an investment from outside money means it has not taken other funds needed for education and human services.

Kentucky's tobacco settlement funds are meant to make a difference in the long-term.

While new sources of revenue are needed now to balance the budget legislators should look for them elsewhere. They should make the hard decisions to raise cigarette taxes, cut spending and produce fair tax reform.

